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attached to it; but, though he wrote considerable other verse, there was hardly a spark of inspiration in it all.

We have in this country scores of would-be poets who have each produced one or two creditable pieces which are to their other productions like *Falstaff's* "half-penny worth of bread to this intolerable deal of sack." What can be more cruel than for the friends of these rhymers to goad them on to further effort, after it has become evident that

"Calliope jamais daigne leur parler,
Et Pégase pour eux refuse de voler"?

Because, in a lucky moment, one has dashed off a few verses whose words are steeped in Castalian dews and "colored like the golden exhalations of the dawn," does it follow that he has "the vision and faculty divine" of the inspired bard? Who knows that he has the strength of wing for a series of successful flights—that he has not exhausted himself by his happy efforts? Carlyle says that booksellers would get more for their money if they got less—that is, if they paid for quality instead of for quantity. In like manner, it is better for a poet's fame to have produced a few good verses than a thousand mediocre ones; better one brief poem, shorn of all excrescences and condensed into power, than a myriad of diffuse ones, which are only "tolerable," and therefore "not to be endured."

WILLIAM MATHEWS.

IV.

JOURNALISM IN JAIL.

IT WAS late on Thanksgiving eve in 1883 that the first copy of *The Summary* was struck from the press of the New York State Reformatory at Elmira. Previous to the publication of *The Summary* there had been unsatisfactory attempts in many places to establish a prison newspaper—a newspaper which should be edited and published exclusively by prisoners, which should echo the spirit of its convict founders, and pursue a course to be dictated, not by official pleasure or policy, but by the good sense and judgment of its editor. For many reasons these efforts had either never "grasped the skirt-of circumstance" or had died a natural death from inanition. When Mr. Z. R. Brockway, the general superintendent of the reformatory, made known his wish that a newspaper be started in the prison, there was only one man in the place who was deemed capable of undertaking the task. He was a young burglar, who had graduated from Oxford University in England, and had had a little literary and journalistic experience in New York.

The printing office of the reformatory contained a few fonts of the more common type, and the only printing-press in the institution was a little foot machine, on which about 200 or 300 copies of one 8 × 14-inch page could be run off in an hour. This machine had done service for several years in the reformatory for rough job work, and when the editor of *The Summary* looked it over for the first time his heart failed him, for the press was pretty well battered, and it had a creaking, disjointed movement that augured ill for the success of the enterprise. The prison engineer, however, patched it up as well as he could. There were two or three typesetters in the institution who had had a very limited experience in small job offices. It was understood that the projected newspaper should cost the State only a merely nominal sum, and all of the material and work was to be found in the office.

After a period of preparation extending over two or three weeks, the first complete copy of *The Summary* was put in form, and the work of running off began. The project was kept a close secret, so that the distribution of the first edition of *The Summary* caused a genuine sensation. The general plan of the paper was rather ambitious: it embraced a *résumé* of select foreign and domestic news, selections from choice contemporary literature, a page of editorial opinions on home matters, and a page or more of such prison news as was not of a distinctly criminal or vicious character. About 500 copies comprised the first edition, and nearly all of these were distributed among the prisoners.

A few copies, however, managed to get into the hands of outsiders, and the result was more or less notoriety for *The Summary* and its editor. The country press in the vicinity of Elmira "boomed" the undertaking, and urgent requests for infor-

mation concerning the price of subscription, etc., poured in upon the editor. Thus, although it had been intended to confine the circulation of *The Summary* to the prisoners of the reformatory, the paper began to go out among people whose curiosity or sympathy had been aroused, and many editors who had heard of the innovation generously offered exchange courtesies.

The editor of *The Summary* at this time was also secretary of the prison schools; he enjoyed very few more privileges than were granted to any other prisoner; hence most of his work was done late at night in his cell. The printers, too, were busy all day at their regular tasks, and could find time only at uncertain intervals to work on the paper. Moreover, the little rickety press had a habit of going to pieces on critical occasions. At such times, when the damage was too great for the editorial hand to repair, the kind offices of the daily newspapers of Elmira were sought. *The Summary* never missed an issue, but went on in steady progress till its size was increased and it was published at more frequent intervals. It is now an eight-page weekly paper. It devotes an entire page to extracts on topics of the time, another to notes of sociological importance, another to "Contemporary History," another to "Salmagundi"; there is also a page giving a *résumé* of the week's news; and the editor reserves a page for the expression of his own opinions. The home news occupies two pages.

It is noteworthy that very little assistance has been rendered by the prisoners in the way of contributions to *The Summary*. A "Contributors' Page" was established in the early days, and maintained for two or three years; but the editor was obliged to write nearly all the "contributed articles." The scarcity of suitable editors among the prisoners has always been discouraging. I retained the editorial management of the paper for three or four years, and subsequently two prisoners successively had editorial control. A position in Elmira was offered me not long after I left the reformatory to go to New York, and again, by special request, I took charge of *The Summary* on a salary, and held it for some time. Mr. Brockway prefers not to exercise any dictatorial function in the management, and, while he writes an occasional article, he has never been editor of the paper.

The name of *The Summary* was adopted with a distinct purpose. It was originally intended that the paper should be a summary of the best news of the day; and so far as the treatment of outside matters is concerned *The Summary* more than vindicates its pretensions. Many prominent journalists and authors have kindly expressed their appreciation of what they were pleased to call the "admirable condensation" of *The Summary* and the "dignified and polished tone" of its editorial utterances. It has been necessary, however, to depart to some extent from the original plan so far as the treatment of home matters is concerned. By far the larger part of prison life is routine, and the sensational incidents that occur are of necessity carefully suppressed, so that one of the most serious problems that has always confronted the editor is the difficulty of securing eligible home news. Many a time I have left my desk and stolen out into the prison yard to obtain, if possible, some little item that might interest my readers. I have been almost glad when a prisoner has been injured by machinery or an accident to a belt or a pulley has occurred in one of the shops. A large fire once in the prison factories was a god-send.

It was not always pleasant work, however. There were the inexorable two columns to fill with home news, and "padding" was out of the question. My system was to have two or three men in each department of the institution keep an eye out for news. Prisoners are not permitted to talk to other prisoners, and this added to the difficulty. Whenever the Board of Managers met, I was always sure of a "three-stick story" at least. The physician also supplied me with an occasional interesting item, and I worked the mine of the schools to the last vein. It was necessary, however, to guard carefully against any appearance of triviality or frivolity in the news columns. At one time I secured the favor of the superintendents of various departments, and from them obtained many interesting "stories."

One man did all the work. He prepared and edited the news and the newspaper and magazine selections, wrote the editorials, read proof, and "made up" the forms. After a while the office was enlarged, a Hoe steam press was purchased,

and the typographical facilities were improved. We had three New York daily newspapers and a considerable number of weekly exchanges, and we borrowed the magazines. We thought at one time during the blizzard in the spring of 1888 that we should have to miss an issue, but we secured communication with the outside world in time.

The editorial writing gave us a little trouble. For a long period we indulged in moral homilies, but the necessities of weekly journalism and the obligations which an extended constituency imposed were recognized and met, and we came after a time to discuss secular matters with freedom and candor. We frequently had occasion to criticise public men, and we tried hard not to discriminate between Trojan and Tyrian. Once I wrote a severe criticism of something the Rev. R. Heber Newton had said, and he promptly sent to me a handsome letter of thanks. There was always a well-defined spirit of friendly rivalry between *The Summary* and the prison papers that followed us, and this formed the subject of many an editorial leader. We usually took care, however, to discuss questions of general interest, and the only time we transgressed the bounds of courtesy was in a controversy with the editor of the *Ohio School Journal*, a paper published at the Ohio Reform School. Then we became almost vituperative, but the discussion ended amicably.

Among its home readers *The Summary* has become a moral and intellectual censor of more or less power. It shapes the public sentiment of the institution on important questions, since it receives the exclusive news and makes its interpretation with a certain *ex-cathedra* definiteness. It has helped to raise the moral and intellectual standard of the place, and Mr. Brockway values it highly as an educational agent. It serves to maintain among the prisoners that sympathetic interest in outside matters which a convict nearly always loses, and which is one of the most horrible results of imprisonment; and it forms, also, an important tie between the felon in the cell and the spirit of righteousness that moves in free human society.

After the fame of *The Summary* spread abroad, several newspapers were started in prisons, and at present there are a number of such journals.

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